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ABSTRACT

State board of education members across the country cite four essential tasks of state boards in improving school quality: (1) improving teacher quality, (2) raising academic standards, (3) improving school leadership and management, and (4) promoting effective use of school time. To combat the drain of talent from the teaching profession and to improve school climate, state boards can help prospective teachers with financial incentives, require tests and internships to ensure their competence, and periodically review teacher training programs. Students' academic standards can also be raised, through core curricula and diagnostic testing, mandating kindergarten, and supporting special programs. Administration can be improved through statewide standards, inservice training, incentives for outstanding performance and programs, and recruitment of women and minorities. Finally, school effectiveness may depend on the efficient use of school time; a minimum percentage of student time spent in core subjects and reduced absenteeism can both ensure better use of inschool time. (JW)

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POLICY OPTIONS

FOR

QUALITY EDUCATION

A REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION QUALITY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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NASBE Task Force on Education Quality

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Introduction

The popular appeal of the recent reports on education lies in their ability to express an emerging consensus on the goals of public schooling. This consensus is shaped around the fundamental mission of schools – to teach students, to impart intellectual and vocational skills that will prepare young people for adulthood, and to foster academic achievement for all students. The educational climate of the 1980s will be shaped by this new consensus.

Achieving consensus, if only temporarily, on education objectives is a significant accomplishment. But can this consensus be translated into concrete and enduring action? The next major challenge is to translate ideas and goals into practical, working policies and programs.

As state board members, we have an opportunity to assert leadership and muster support for dramatic educational change. Our challenge is to act on the new consensus while continuing our decades-long effort to ensure education for all. All of our citizens, not just an academic elite, must be fully educated.

Major responsibility for meeting the challenge rests with state boards of education. State boards hold responsibility, along with governors and legislators, for creating state-level education policies. Their decisions on the finance and governance of education can advance or impede the effort to improve education quality. This is no time for "business as usual."

To meet the need for direction in educational change, the National Association of State Boards of Education created a Task Force on Education Quality. The Task Force examined the recommendations presented in the recent reports and consulted a wide range of experts. Its report is designed primarily for state board members, to assist them as leaders in the long-term effort to achieve excellence in education.

In considering policy options for state board members, the Task Force understands that the goal of educational excellence cannot be reached by putting bandaids on current educational

problems. If we are going to reform education, we must have a broad vision of what the world will be like for future graduates, and we must be willing to make fundamental changes in the way we think about educational goals. The technological future requires rethinking the definition of an educated person to emphasize creativity and decisionmaking and synthesis skills. Rethinking the definition may not mean radical departures in practice; many of these "new" skills reside in a liberal arts, general education curriculum.

This report recommends options for state board members to consider as they design policies to improve instruction, raise academic standards, attract better-qualified personnel, and improve administrative and management practices in schools. The Task Force recommends that states act on four related fronts:

1. States should improve the quality of the teacher workforce through policies designed to recruit and retain more able personnel.

2. States should raise academic standards for student performance through adoption of a strong core curriculum, a system of student testing aimed at diagnosis and remediation rather than mere competence, and special programs that allow all students to reach their intellectual potential.

3. States should enact policies, parallel to those enacted for teachers, to select, train, and reward highly qualified school principals and other administrators.

4. States should find ways to promote effective use of school time and to increase the amount of time spent on serious instruction and learning activities.

There are many possible ways for state boards to proceed in each of these areas. The purpose of this report is to suggest some promising approaches. Clearly, there is no best way. Political, social, and economic conditions vary widely from state to state. This report lays out a series of options directed at those areas of reform in which state boards should act.

One conclusion emerging from all of the reports on education is that public officials and citizens face difficult choices. There are limits to the ability of schools to solve all problems. Schools

cannot serve as the sole transmitter of all of our society's ideals, values, and knowledge. Education must be a shared responsibility of home, school, and community. The Task Force believes that these institutions must work together in an educational partnership to develop productive relationships for learning.

State board members will be the education leaders of the eighties with primary responsibility for responding to this difficult challenge. By mobilizing support for a partnership with home and community and by emphasizing student achievement in evaluating the success of any education program, state boards can encourage local school officials to initiate reforms that will prepare today's students for tomorrow's world. This report of the Task Force on Education Quality will serve state boards well if it focuses debate and facilitates consideration of these issues.

A STATE BOARD AGENDA

Improving the Quality of the Teacher Workforce

The present crisis in the quality of the school workforce is alarming:

- ☐ Too few of the brightest undergraduate students become teachers, and the quality of those who enter the profession is declining.
- ☐ Schools face severe shortages in some subject areas. They are unable to compete with private industry for talented college graduates in high-demand fields such as math, science, and computer technology.
- ☐ Increased opportunities for women have caused education to lose an historically important source of highly qualified teachers.
- ☐ Low morale, teacher burnout, and lax professional standards are pervasive concerns.

State boards should improve the quality of the teacher workforce by enacting policies to recruit and retain more effective teachers, improve the quality of teacher training, screen out and remove incompetent teachers, and reward teaching excellence.

Recommendation 1. To increase the pool of highly qualified candidates entering the teaching profession, state boards should experiment with a host of financial incentives, including: an across-the-board increase in teacher compensation; mechanisms that reward teaching excellence; and a system of college scholarships, loans, and tuition reductions.

Recommendation 2. To ensure that only qualified teachers are hired, prospective teachers should be given rigorous tests of competence in subject

matter and pedagogical knowledge. In addition, they should be required to serve a period of internship. Once employed, teachers should be periodically reevaluated. A Bachelor's degree and satisfactory performance on objective tests of competence should be prerequisites for employment; however, policies should be developed to qualify persons with relevant work experience or background, similar to current policies for teachers of vocational education.

Recommendation 3. States should institute a systematic review of all teacher training programs and repeat the review in three- to five-year cycles. Review should focus on: (a) raising standards for admission to teacher-training programs; (b) placing greater emphasis on subject-matter competence; (c) providing opportunities for students and faculty to gain valuable hands-on experience by interacting closely with on-the-job teachers and administrators; (6) retraining displaced or surplus teachers to fill shortages in particular areas of the curriculum.

While improved training, increased financial rewards, and competency testing are the major recommendations for improving the quality of the teacher workforce, the Task Force recommends other ways to address teacher quality as well. Clearly, good teachers will continue to leave the profession unless the school climate is improved. To improve school climate, state boards can recognize schools that are success-oriented and develop a sense of ownership, collegiality, and cooperation among staff and students. Such working environments would relieve teachers of much of the responsibility for non-instructional chores (e.g., hall, lunch, and bus duty), and encourage a supportive and cooperative relationship between teachers and parents.

Other ways to make teaching attractive should be explored. State boards should study and experiment with ways to: (a) transfer teaching certificates and retirement benefits among states and school districts; (b) create personnel exchanges between schools, businesses, and universities; (c) encourage efforts to retrain unemployed certified personnel; and (d) employ expert

non-certified personnel when and where short-term needs exist. State boards must also maintain or increase efforts to attract minority-group members to the teaching profession.

Raising Academic Standards

The National Assessment of Education Progress reports that 13 percent of 17-year-olds and 20 percent of adults in the U.S. are "functionally illiterate" on simple everyday tasks of reading, writing, and comprehension. Functional illiteracy runs much higher among some groups — as high as 40 percent among minority youth. But the problem is not limited to simple tasks. It is generally acknowledged that nearly 40 percent of 17-year-olds cannot draw inferences from written material; high-order tasks of comprehension and interpretation are beyond many high school graduates. This low level of competence must not be tolerated. The educated person must be sufficiently literate and possess enough of the knowledge and learning tools in the arts and sciences to be able to continue learning throughout life.

Academic standards must be raised at all grade levels for students of widely ranging abilities. Student performance that goes well beyond minimum standards must be encouraged through programs that respond to the diverse interests and abilities of the student population. In raising standards, state boards must review recently purchased textbooks, software, and other teaching materials to ensure that they reflect new, higher academic standards.

Recommendation 1. In order to raise minimum achievement standards, two courses of action are recommended: adoption of a rigorous core curriculum, and implementation of student testing for diagnosis and remedial and other assistance.

Recommendation 2. Schools cannot be satisfied with minimum competence. State boards should mandate kindergarten for all children, with special attention to students who are less likely to attain reading readiness in regular programs. State

> boards should support efforts to establish a variety of programs for special students, including the gifted and students with interests in science and the arts. Attention to the special educational needs of children who are disadvantaged, handicapped, or have limited proficiency in English must be continued to ensure equal opportunity for all.

Implementation of a core curriculum requires that state board members identify subject-matter areas that all students are expected to complete, and specify a minimum number of instructional hours. State boards should also establish a system of assessing student outcomes based on the concepts of minimum competence and mastery learning. Any system of testing should be accompanied by a parallel effort to diagnose student deficiencies and provide appropriate remedial assistance. However, graduation from elementary education and from junior and senior high schools must rest on satisfactory completion of a core curriculum and demonstrated competence in its basic knowledge components.

Higher academic standards must not be pursued at the expense of recent gains in educational equity and opportunity for all students. Officials must strive for a delicate balance between the common interests of our society and the diverse abilities of a heterogeneous student population. Non-college-bound students need appropriate vocational instruction, career counseling, and other preparation for success in the workplace.

School Organization: Leadership and Management

The schools are the basic organizational unit responsible for providing instruction. The school principal – the leader – is a critical force in determining school climate, student and teacher attitudes, and instructional practices. When schools are effective, it is largely because they have effective principals. Yet the role of the school principal as a leader has eroded. Principals are increasingly burdened with administrative chores and have less and less voice in the selection of faculties.

State boards of education should challenge schools to create an environment for quality education by: (1) establishing programs to improve the leadership and management capabilities of the administrative force; and (2) providing guidance to districts in the adoption of policies and practices identified with educational excellence.

Recommendation 1. State boards should define the knowledge and interpersonal skills that make for effective school principals and establish statewide principal certification requirements. Boards should help school districts design systems for periodically evaluating principals on the basis of competence, performance, schoolwide learner outcomes, and school-community relations.

Recommendation 2. State boards should establish programs to improve the leadership and management capabilities of principals and other administrative personnel. In-service education, summer institutes, and periodic internships should be instituted to allow exchange of information, including information on current research, and to teach school leadership skills, organizational dynamics, and personnel management techniques.

Recommendation 3. Administrative salaries do not adequately recognize differences in performance. State boards should encourage awards to administrators who carry out major unit, school, or districtwide reforms.

Recommendation 4. State boards should create statewide programs to recognize effective schools. These programs should adopt indicators of academic performance and school environment, such as efficient and effective use of instructional time and at-home learning; incentives for appropriate classroom behavior; involvement of teachers in school decisionmaking; broad and active parent participation; active school-community partnerships; and a broad range of activities an programs that offer students many routes to achievement.

Recommendation 5. State boards should continue or expand efforts to encourage women and minorities to compete for administrative positions.

The Effective Use of Time

There is substantial evidence that "time on task" is a major determinant of student learning. Although schools should be increasing the proportion of school time devoted to serious instruction and student learning, precisely the opposite is occurring. Less time is actually spent on academic coursework now than was spent 20 years ago. The curriculum has become diffuse and fragmented, and non-educational activities have significantly intruded on the school day. Educators must find ways to capture more time for instruction and learning. One byproduct of efforts to improve teacher quality and raise academic standards will be more effective use of time. Other steps can be taken as well.

The Task Force places top priority on the effective use of time already available in the school day and year. Until existing resources are properly managed, proposals to extend the school calendar are premature.

Recommendation 1. State boards should set minimums for the percentage of the school day during which students must receive and teachers must provide instruction in core subjects.

Recommendation 2. State boards should establish policies on student absenteeism that: (a) set minimum attendance levels for promotion; and (b) require higher levels of attendance for participation in extracurricular activities.

Recommendation 3. State boards should ensure that state training and technical assistance activities provide guidance to school principals and other administrators on ways to increase effective use of instructional time.

There is still much to be learned about effective use of school time. States, along with other governmental entities, can conduct research, evaluation, and demonstration activities on such topics as: extension of the school day or year for such purposes as academic enrichment, remedial instruction, and inservice training; the effectiveness of study halls; ways to reduce the paperwork and record-keeping burdens of teachers; the relationship between the length of the school day/year and academic achievement; the effect of extracurricular activities during regular school hours on student learning; and the effect of varying the length of time teachers spend with particular groups of students.

Conclusion

The United States is entering a period of rapid technological and economic change. This change will require that youth entering the workforce be better educated and more skilled than ever before. State boards of education must address this new challenge as well as the decline in educational quality. It is essential, therefore, that the opportunity provided now by public and political awareness of the need for reform not be squandered.

State boards of education have legal and constitutional responsibility for leadership. Ultimately, the recommendations of task forces, study groups, and political bodies will be implemented through specific policies and programs enunciated by state boards. Their policies and programs will play a crucial role in the national effort to promote educational excellence, higher academic achievement, and a new sense of pride among all members of the education community.

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

State boards influence the educational directions in the state. State boards do not act alone; they interact with the chief state school officer, the legislature, the governor, local constituents, and state level associations of administrators, teachers, and school boards. Through their state-level policy development and adoption process, and by virtue of their relationship with the state legislatures, state boards determine the tone, direction, and quality of education in their states.

Created in 1959 with an initial membership of eleven states, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) now has a membership composed of the state boards of education in 46 states and five U.S. territories. It is a dynamic and effective Association representing these state boards of education as they seek to promote quality education in the states and to strengthen the tradition of lay control of American public education.